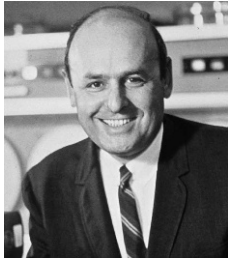


Martin M. Cummings, AHIP, FMLA, 1920–2011



Martin M. Cummings, MD, AHIP, FMLA, director of the National Library of Medicine (NLM) for twenty years, died on September 1, 2011, just six days before his ninety-first birthday. At the time of his retirement in 1984, he was the second longest serving NLM director, a tenure only exceeded by that of Dr. John Shaw Billings, a man greatly admired by Dr. Cummings and one whom he quoted often in many speeches and publications.

A graduate of Bucknell College and the Duke University School of Medicine, Dr. Cummings spent virtually his entire career in public service. In 1946, he entered the Public Health Service, becoming a commissioned officer with extensive training in bacteriology and tuberculosis. He later became the director of the Tuberculosis Evaluation Laboratory at the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta. From 1949 to 1959, he continued his work in tuberculosis research with the Veteran's Administration (VA) in Georgia. He subsequently was elevated to director of research services in the VA's Washington, DC, office. Dr. Cummings and his colleagues published sixty-five articles related to tuberculosis and sarcoidosis. From 1959 to 1961, he was chairman of the Department of Microbiology at the University of Oklahoma School of Medicine.

His illustrious career at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) began in 1961, when he served as NIH Director James Shannon's chief of the NIH Office of International Research, followed in 1963 as his director for research

grants. While Dr. Cummings often said, "I never applied for the job of NLM Director," he readily took it on with great vigor and dedication.

On New Year's Day of 1964, Dr. Cummings was handed the reins of NLM, and he brought with him a whole new perspective to its mission. Speaking to the NLM Board of Regents two weeks before he assumed his duties, he said, "The Library has an unmatched opportunity to serve national and international needs in the health communications area...and it has a need to broaden its interest to provide a creative, imaginative contribution to the increasing complexities of communications" [1]. This began a long and valuable alliance with NLM's regents, a group he referred often to as his "Board of Directors." Knowing the importance and prestige of a presidentially appointed advisory group, he quickly assembled a host of major players, including William Anlyan, head of the Duke University Medical Center; Bruno Augenstein, vice president of research at the Rand Corporation; William Baker, president of Bell Labs; Susan Crawford, AHIP, FMLA, the American Medical Association's director of libraries; Michael E. DeBaakey, world-renowned cardiac surgeon and chancellor, Baylor College of Medicine; Bernice Hetzner, Regional Medical Library (RML) director at the University of Nebraska; William Hubbard, dean of the University of Michigan Medical School and president of UpJohn; and Al Zipf, pioneer in electronic banking and executive vice president of the Bank of America, among others. Members of the board not only provided invaluable policy advice, but often were called upon by Dr. Cummings for guidance in major operational matters, such as selection of appropriate computer technologies, negotiations with international partners, and recruitment of key personnel. Dr. Cummings also called upon his vast number of international colleagues developed during his work

at the NIH Office of International Research to expand NLM into many international settings.

In the mid 1960s, the prevailing view of many in the country and in Congress was that health sciences libraries were wonderful institutions for collecting and organizing vast amounts of valuable medical knowledge. Early in his tenure at NLM, Dr. Cummings stated in Congressional testimony before Senator Lister Hill, "I think we are not only entering into a new era of acquisitions of medical knowledge but the more exciting prospect related to the dissemination and utilization of new knowledge which is being generated as a result of research and scholarship throughout the world" [2]. It was this keen philosophy that Dr. Cummings brought to improving MEDLARS and the development of MEDLARS online, now known as MEDLINE. He believed that the ever-increasing magnitude and diversity of knowledge could be mastered only by applying new technologies to store and retrieve medical information upon demand.

He often spoke of knowledge as being potential power and said first, knowledge must be converted to information, and second, knowledge only takes on usefulness when it is transmitted to society in as open a way as possible. He was a fierce advocate for the view that information was a public good that should be disseminated at the lowest possible cost and that only in the case of national security should information be concealed in any way. To quote him, "Secrecy in a democratic society is a source of illegitimate power. The withholding of information by any part of government is in direct conflict with democratic principles of decision making. Under our constitutional theory, the people are the masters and the government is the servant" [3]. Dr. Cummings clearly held in high regard the importance of public service, and it permeated his decision-making processes and

the very way that NLM developed medical information resources under his direction.

Dr. Cummings knew from the outset that he must find a path to strengthen medical libraries and convert them into active communication centers that could support the information needs of the health community. He wanted NLM to avoid becoming a monolithic medical library center that would have to serve the entire nation. Instead, he campaigned for the library to become the backbone of a national network of libraries and worked determinedly for passage of the 1965 Medical Library Assistance Act (MLAA) that he believed would improve library facilities, collections, resources, and personnel. Parlaying the recommendations from the President's Commission on Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke, Dr. Cummings used his ever-present political skills to work with Senator Hill and Congressional Representative Paul Rogers to secure this important legislation that finally allowed NLM the authority to award grants, most significantly, the ground-breaking grant for the establishment of the Regional Medical Library network, plus funding to construct medical library facilities and to support research and development programs in medical library science.

With the passage of the MLAA, the vision of a true national biomedical communication network seemed on the horizon. Dr. Cummings did not hesitate to act, for with MLAA behind him, he had the mandate and the tools to create an infrastructure through which he could lead the nation's and the world's health sciences professionals into the Information Age. He was convinced that the final step in conversion of traditional medical libraries into active information centers was to introduce a robust research program that would apply new technologies to health information transfer. To accomplish this, he garnered Surgeon General Luther Terry's support to develop a detailed five-year plan for the creation of a biomedical communication network. Armed with the plan, he

returned to visit Representative Rogers and Senator Hill and persuaded them to endorse the plan and provide funding.

Dr. Cummings then recruited Ruth Davis, a highly skilled scientific administrator, to lead this effort. This was indicative of Dr. Cummings's management style for he always assigned the highest priority to finding the best and brightest individuals to lead his program initiatives. He hired Marjorie Wilson to launch the extramural programs; Joseph Leiter and, later, Lois Ann Colaianni, AHIP, FMLA, to manage the important basic library services; Henry Kissman, AHIP, to take on the toxicology information program; Charles Bridgman to revamp the audiovisual program transferred to the library from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Mary Corning to direct and build his international program; and William G. Cooper to establish a robust planning function. Dr. Cummings was regarded as a fair but demanding administrator, who rewarded his staff richly for their skill and devotion to the development of NLM programs.

Dr. Cummings was a strong leader who strove to achieve excellence in everything he pursued but found the proper time to relax as well. He was an ardent fisherman who enjoyed his time at his home on the Chesapeake Bay, where he entertained many guests. Politicians were sometimes invited to the Bay, where they were treated to what many called his unique "fisherman diplomacy." He often extended his hospitality to his staff so that they could experience his smoked fish, delight in the crab cakes he personally prepared, or just simply enjoy picking crabs along with a good cold drink. His wife, Arlene, would often take guests to pick fruit at a nearby farm or walk them down to the beach to look for sharks' teeth. Dr. Cummings was the perfect host. Bruno Vasta, former branch chief in Specialized Information Services Division of NLM, a longtime colleague and fishing companion, said, "I enjoyed days on the Bay

with Dr. Cummings and admired his bringing the Toxicology Information Program to NLM and the development of the Toxicology Data Network, TOXNET" [4].

Dr. Cummings's long-desired goal to create a research component to his national network was achieved when, with the retirement of Senator Hill, Dr. Cummings engineered the passage of the joint resolution bearing the senator's name to formally establish NLM's research and development program and a facility to house it. On May 20, 1980, at the dedication ceremony of the Lister Hill Center, Dr. Cummings realized his dream of launching a new era in communication services to the biomedical community.

In closing the chapter on Dr. Cummings's achievements at NLM, it is important to note the work he directed all the way to the Supreme Court to protect the doctrine of "fair use" as it applied to photocopying and disseminating medical literature. This goal was finally achieved after a protracted battle with a private sector publisher. This groundbreaking case stands today as not only a great benefit to biomedicine, but for library and information centers nationwide. In Dr. Cummings's words, "Winning the right to photocopy literature under controlled conditions was the most important contribution NLM made to all library users in all fields of research and education and a major benefit to society as a whole" [5]. When Dr. Cummings retired from the library, William D. Mayer wrote in the January 1984 *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* that Dr. Cummings "knew how to marshal support within the health professions and was an articulate and forceful defender—in print or on the podium—of medical libraries and their essential services" [6]. In 1973, the Medical Library Association (MLA) conferred upon him its highest honor, the Marcia C. Noyes Award.

Institutions worldwide recognized Dr. Cummings's accomplishments. He received honorary doctorates from Bucknell College;

Emory University; Georgetown University; University of Nebraska; the Academy of Medicine in Lodz, Poland; and the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden. He received numerous prestigious honors and awards, including the Rockefeller Public Service Award, the most prestigious recognition to a federal civil servant; the Abraham Horowitz Award for Inter-American Health for his work with the Pan American Health Organization to establish BIREME, the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences; the VA Exceptional Service Medal; Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's (DHEW's) Superior and Distinguished Service Awards; the American College of Cardiology Distinguished Service Award and/or a Fellowship; the American Medical Writers Association Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award; election as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; the MLA Joseph Leiter Lectureship Award; the Association of Federal Information Managers Committee on Scientific and Technical Information Achievement Award; the Duke University Medical School Distinguished Alumnus Award; the NLM Regents Special Award for Leadership and Accomplishments; Phi Beta Kappa; and his own Haddon Heights High School Alumnus of the Year Award. During his NLM tenure, Dr. Cummings presented over 150 speeches and published 67 articles, often including his own historical research related to NLM; however, he was quick to emphasize and compliment NLM staff for their valuable contributions of data for his speeches and his publications.

Not one to rest on his laurels, following his retirement from NLM, Dr. Cummings kept up his strong interest in and devotion to libraries by working with the Council on Library Resources, under the leadership of Deanna Marcum. In a tribute to Dr. Cummings, she expressed his contributions this way:

When Marty Cummings retired from the National Library of Medi-

cine, he could have taken a well-deserved rest, but the entire library community benefitted from his decision to join the Council on Library Resources as a senior advisor to work on broad, general problems, mostly related to the economics of libraries. He brought an analytical approach and an intellect that inspired all of us who worked with him...He was a true believer in evidence-based research, and his approach brought a renewed credibility to the path-breaking work of the Council on Library Resources. Dr. Cummings was determined and dogged in pursuit of the best outcome for libraries and their users. I would not have wanted to be on opposite sides of any issue with him! He was also gentle and kind and supportive. The library community is better for having had him working on our behalf for so many years. [7]

Dr. Cummings retired to Sarasota, Florida, where he found time to pursue his passion for fishing and to continue his professional medical and library interests, particularly on research related to macular degeneration and cardiology. His frequent local speaking engagements continued through early 2011. Inspired by his vision problems and interest in assisting others, he developed a Low Vision Resource Center for residents with limited vision thereby benefiting scores of people in his newfound community. His library interests included consultant work with NLM's MedlinePlus. The current NLM director, Donald A. B. Lindberg, often called upon Dr. Cummings's expertise, and he was always willing to set aside his time to provide it. As Dr. Lindberg said in NLM's published testament to Dr. Cummings:

Marty Cummings was a very effective leader of NLM, as well as an advocate for its programs...In his community in Florida, he became a conduit for all the information services NLM had to offer for the residents. Through his group on low vision, we too learned better to serve this public. Essentially he never gave up. I'm proud to have known Marty Cummings. [8]

William Hubbard Jr., former chair of the NLM Board of Re-

gents, speaking at Dr. Cummings's memorial service said that his friend and colleague could best be described as a passionate man, particularly about family, friends, service, justice, and humanity. He said he was a dedicated physician and scientist who was data driven and analytically oriented and an impatient critic, a hardworking optimist, and one who believed that human effort could best improve the human condition [9]. Dr. Hubbard concluded his remarks characterizing Dr. Cummings as a modest man who seemed to always talk about other peoples' accomplishments and who in life followed the path set by Micah: "he did justice, loved kindness and walked humbly" [9].

Dr. Cummings will be remembered as one of NLM's great and inspiring directors. His leadership, tenacity, and brilliance significantly bolstered the quality of US health sciences libraries and transformed the NLM into a national biomedical communications center.

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